

THE USAU YOUTH



Issue 004, Volume I

APRIL 2012

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RIGHTS OF FUTURE GENERATIONS AND HUMAN DIGNITY FOR THE EMERGENCE OF AFRICA

The rights of future generations are those rights that meet the needs of the present generation without compromising those of future generations - it is all about environmental protection. This concept is one that many people do not fully understand. It's simple; people who do not currently exist also have rights which must be respected and protected. Environmental protection is one of the reasons why we celebrate Earth Day. This article will bring to light the bases and content of the fight for the protection of the rights of future generations, as well as how an abuse of these rights affects the development of people who are yet to come. Above all, it draws attention to the need to conserve the environment as a "common heritage" by practicing sustainable development.

An elaboration of the right of future generations

Future generations have the right to be assured that *we will not pollute water with toxic wastes, extinguish habitats and species, or change the world's climate dramatically - all of the long-term effects that are difficult or even impossible to reverse* (Edith Brown Weiss). Let's take this example, if someone was to set off a bomb that would continuously affect people for

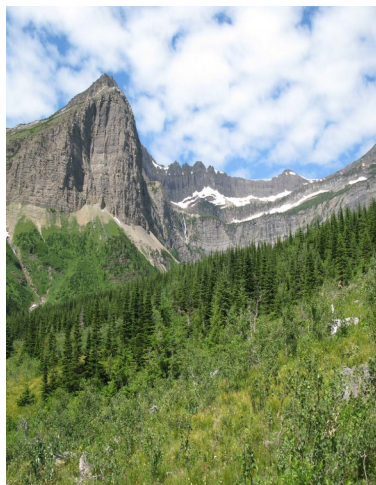
the next 100 years, or even a bomb that would explode in exactly 50 years from now, is he committing a crime or not? Should he be tried before a court of law and prevented from causing further harm? I believe everyone's response will be a big

YES. So then *pollution, climate change, and extinguishing flora and fauna species* is a ticking **time bomb**, and our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren are **the victims**. We are also victims to some extent, considering the steady increase of people who are becoming more and more prone to lung and skin diseases, water-borne illnesses, and congenital abnormalities from toxics in their food and water.

There are so many reasons for environmental depletion; **development and technology** are a major factor,

and there also exist a vicious circle that links environmental degradation to poverty. The lack of good hygienic conditions compromises the health of the population. As such, another great cause of environmental problems arises from the **lack of economic resources**, which aggravate misery and poverty. As evidenced by the *Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development* (OECD), **"poverty reduction, economic**

growth, and the 'environmental resources' necessary for life are closely related. That is why the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) include, among others, work to reverse the trend of environmental degradation."



Images of mountain and rainforest by PICS4LEARNING.COM

Development and technology are the reasons for deforestation, resulting in the loss of habitats for wild animals, the killing of animals, and the all around pollution of water and air. True enough, development and technology are fundamental to human life, they take man from a phase of latency to one of fulfillment, but when undertaken in an isolated and untamed manner, we not only disrespect the notion of development itself, we also affect the lives of our successors.

This disregard often comes from the fact that the

EDITORIAL NOTE

'Volunteer to protect your environment'! This is the theme of the April edition of our newsletter. When we take care of the earth, we take care of ourselves; there's no way we can be assured of our health if we chose to get comfortable in a polluted world. **March 20** was International Earth Day but a global observance is held by many other countries, the U.S. inclusive, on **April 22**. You are thereby invited to join **The USAU Youth** celebrate this day by joining us on Facebook and sharing with us for a whole month, the activities you do to commemorate this day via <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Did-You-Know-Le-Saviez-Vous/181760325263595>

Discover this month how little changes, like volunteerism, can make you go international in **page 2**, and try merging that new knowledge with a little practice of environmental conservation for future generations (**page 1**). You are also likely to get more interested in volunteer activities from our tête-à-tête discussion with **Dr. Raymond Agossou**, Head of the Human Resources and Youth Division of the African Union on **page 8**.

So now sit down, relax, and enjoy yourself as you read on.

Fanso Bari
USAU Youth Liaison to the AU

benefits of economic development are often more immediate, important, and obvious to community members and local officials; while the benefits of environmental protection are *often less evident and immediate*. Consequently, we develop our world on one hand, and leave the non-existence of several living organisms, barren lands, vehicles without petrol, factories with no power to run them, and mountains of concrete and jungles of skyscrapers to replace the future generation's need for forests and hills. When the environment is degraded, the right to development is affected; thus, both values must therefore be considered together.

How then can we practice sustainable development which is, *"development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs,"* as stated in the Brundtland Report?

Sustainable development based on the correlation of human dignity and common heritage

The relationship between the concepts of human dignity, common heritage, and sustainable development is like a mathematical equation that goes: **Human Dignity + Common Heritage = Sustainable Development**. Let me explain this better, *human dignity* is the idea that *"something is due to man merely because he is a human being"* (Paul Ricœur). This implies that every individual whether dead, living, or still to be born, deserves unconditional respect regardless of age, sex, physical or mental health, religion, social status, or the ethnicity of the individual in question. When this is put together with the concept of *common heritage* which ethically means *our riches do not really belong to us*, it makes us obliged to consider future generations, resulting in the concept of *sustainable development*.

Sustainable development is therefore **the respect of human dignity** that is, enjoying our *right and dignity to develop our world, our freedom to use nature's gifts to us but not more than that which can be carried on in perpetuity, so that we do not abuse the rights of future generations*; and sustainable development is also **the use of land as a common heritage** which is, *holding the planet as a trust for future generations*. The minute we stray into unsustainable levels of consump-

tion, we are no longer spending what is ours, but are abusing what belongs to future people. That is sustainable development!

The law that rules environmental protection is known as **environmental law**; its main objective as stated by **Alexander Kiss**, an international law professor and environmental right advocate, is *"...to protect people by providing them with an adequate living environment."* By this he means that, a healthy environment is absolutely necessary for the development of human potential, which is the basic principle of human dignity.

How we can contribute in promoting and protecting the rights of future generations

Environmental protection is a test of intra-generational justice: the ecological preservation of the quality of life does not only implicate the future, but also guarantees decent living conditions for all today. The ways in which we can protect the environment for ourselves and for generations to come, is by raising the awareness of individuals and governments to the immediate and long term effects of our actions on the environment. It is also important for each of us to practice the 3Rs which are **Reduce** – reduce the amount of waste created by purchasing goods in bulk, goods with less packaging, and switching to reusable instead of single-use items; **Reuse** – reuse your items to minimize the strain on the environment – for example, you can refill a purchased bottle of water from home with juice instead of throwing the bottle away; and **Recycle** – segregating your discarded waste is important. Recyclables include glass, newspapers, aluminum, and cardboard to name a few.

It is our role to bring to the attention of our African leaders, the fact that environmental protection deserves more consideration as a fundamental right, and should be effectively implemented. As future leaders, we would not like to take over a degraded world; we need our current leaders to prepare the future for us. We must stand up to assert this right and claim positive actions from public authorities. While the situation is bad now, if we do nothing, it will be worse tomorrow.

In every wrong action we carry out against the environment today, the most affected by it are the voiceless because they are not yet here to defend their cause.

Oumba Parfait
PhD student - Catholic University of Central Africa (UCAC)
Yaoundé, Cameroon

EVOLVING INTERNATIONALLY WITH A FOCUSED MINDSET

For so many, launching their careers internationally is a dream come true due to several factors ranging from comprehensive benefits, compensations, childcare services, training and education to higher career growth opportunity. Although, the pressure and the workload of working under big companies like multinational or international organizations might be much higher than local companies, the opportunities are enormous - work exposure, networking opportunities, the list just goes on.

Working for a multinational organization with branches around the world may offer you opportunities such as foreign training or overseas work experience - the exposure is incomparable. For example, working in the Human Resources (HR) department of a large organization with different units handling different subjects, provides various exposure and networking opportunities through work with people from different parts of the globe. In contrast, many small companies have limited HR activities and manage these functions with a handful of people who are deprived of exposure and networking opportunities.

That said it is important to understand the dynamics of the international community before thinking of venturing into it. You must ask yourself questions like ***do you have what it takes to work for these organizations***. I know the answer for so many of us might be a yes after a rundown on our Curriculum Vitae (CVs); smiling at what we have been able to achieve. As of October 2011, the world's population was estimated to be 7 billion, but it will shock you to know that not less than 0.5% of the world's population would be aspiring for that international job like you. That is about 35 million people!

I was convinced about being a diplomat in my last year in college after watching the former UN Secretary General – Kofi Annan preside over a conflict issue related with Middle East and I said to myself, ***"I want to be like him someday"***. On my first day in class at the university, my professor asked the entire class why we decided to study international relations; I was shocked to discover that 95% of a class of 165 students gave the same reason as I did. So how do you stand out for that position?

The International community is a constantly evolving one and for you to stay relevant, you have to keep up with the changing trends of the International system. Bottom line – **Keep learning...**

Do not wait doing nothing or just going with the flow and thinking your time would come. That is the failure ideology. Very few would be lucky at getting a breakthrough from the very beginning but the majority would not and if you find yourself among that majority, then you have to work even harder. Do not be afraid of starting small. A very good way to start would be taking up an *unpaid internship or a volunteering position*; you would be surprised at the experience you would garner and might just find yourself speaking as an expert at your next proper job interview. A lot of us bother about what people would say or think... Ignore the side talks, they are just a distraction! A popular Nigerian rapper once said ***"haters...keep hating while I'm trying to build a brand"***. Focus! You can start locally but have a global ideology!

It is important to be very **inquisitive**. It will help you. We are blessed to be part of an information age where most of the things you want are just a click away. Surf the internet for information that would build and increase you and not spend quality time doing too much of social networking. I once asked two of my good friends what they had gained from the internet in the last year. The first said he had increased his Facebook friends and Twitter followership and his followers think he is witty! And the other said ***"well, I was looking for job opportunities online and I found this school that was offering a scholarship for an online Postgraduate diploma and I applied. I have just completed that and was awarded a scholarship to do an online Masters."*** **What exactly do you do when you are online???** Social networking is good, but prioritizing is better!

Most multinational organizations look out for your independence, cultural sensitivity and awareness, self-confidence and reliance, as well as language proficiency. Other new skills can include problem solving, dealing with ambiguity and constant change – you MUST love it, you must be informed about the industry and where the power is located, managing a limited budget, handling situations diplomatically and building lasting relationships - in the real and in the virtual world. You must have the ability to create visions about the future and how you and your organization, fit into the larger picture, how to create strategies and put them into practical plans and actions. You must know how to act as an ambassador and a leader, regardless of your position, and have respect for different nationalities, cultures, and religions.

Look out for an international perspective and country-specific skills that can be useful when thinking about a certain market, overseas office, or customer base. It is important to consider the job description for your desired position: what specific skills are mentioned and what can you pull from your study/research to strengthen your case? Make a list of your transferable skills and the job qualifications, and then match them up, being sure to highlight these in both your résumé and interview. Stay positive at all times, or as one of my friends would say; ***"realistically positive!"***

Kenneth N. Oliko

*Department of Social Affairs, African Union Commission
African Union Youth Volunteer / Communication and Advocacy Associate*

MONTHLY PROVERB

Taking a bath in cold water



Nothing to do? Go to 9GAG.COM

Photo by 9GAG.COM

'One who bathes willingly with cold water doesn't feel the cold.' – East African Proverb

The act of bathing in cold water really replicates the wisdom of this proverb. The more a person resists the water, the more he or she renders its chill powerful. On the other hand, once this person succeeds to get into the water the chilliness of it immediately disappears.

The meaning of this is, ***if you are willing to overcome your fears and learn from your mistakes, you will certainly overcome those obstacles, hindrances, or complications that stand on your way, or better still, realize that there were no threats at all.*** Remember, whatever you resist always persists.

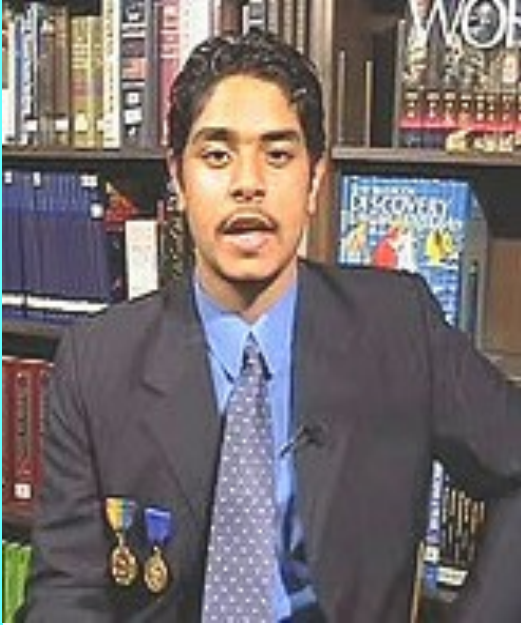
Enjoy yourself and see you next month.

Bati Fanso

*African Union Youth Volunteer (AU-YV)
USAU Youth Liaison to the AU*

MOHANAD MEKKY AN INVENTOR FOR THE DISABLED

Mohanad Mekky is only in his early twenties but his invention will put many Ph.D. students to shame. Mohanad has created a system that enables paraplegics to use a computer keyboard and mouse with head movements, eye winks, and foot taps.



Mohanad Mekky — The young Egyptian inventor.

Born in Egypt, the land that still hides many mysteries, Mekky could not help but try to unravel some of the mysteries that surrounded him. At a very tender age, he will ask his parents questions about his toy car which they could not answer. Many years later in his early teens, he enrolled in private courses where he learned how to repair TVs with the greater intention of mastering audio and video circuits, power supply, and wireless receivers. In 2006, Mekky moved to the University of Alexandria's Faculty of Engineering where he began inventing.

Two reasons led to his first invention; the first was a disabled friend of Mekky who said he felt left out of Facebook chats because of a birth defect that affected his hands. The second was a car accident that sent Mekky on the wheelchair for three months. These situations gave him the chance to understand the plight of the disabled and he began thinking of alternative body parts that disabled people could use.

This was how he came about with a computer that anyone can operate without using their hands and legs; and what's more Mekky made the device cheap so that anyone will be able to purchase it.

He has several other inventions, most of which are tilted to help disabled people like the bat-inspired device for the visually impaired that measures distances, another is a device that allows unmanned lifeboats to rescue shipwreck survivors, and a robot designed to detect and skirt land mines. He looks forward to building a wink-operated wheelchair.

Mekky's inventions have been recognized as he won first place in 2010 at a New York City Science and Engineering Fair and he has participated twice in the World's largest international pre-college science competition, the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair.

Kindly watch Mekky demonstrate how to type emails and play solitaire by tilting his head and winking for the left and right "mouse clicks" by visiting <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LRtgcNuxWw0>.

DISCLAIMER: All the information and photo of Mohanad Mekky has been provided through various open internet sources.

*Fanso Bari B.
African union Youth Volunteer (AUYV)
USAU Youth Liaison to the AU*

SUDOKU PUZZLE

THE NEW PUZZLE - APRIL

2					8			
	7			6		1		8
8					5			
	4	7	1	8				
						7		9
9			7		3	6		4
4		9	5		7	8		1
						5		2
1	5			2	6			

MARCH PUZZLE

1	2	9	8	3	6	4	5	7
5	4	3	1	7	9	2	6	8
6	7	8	2	4	5	9	3	1
4	8	5	6	1	7	3	9	2
9	3	6	4	2	8	7	1	5
2	1	7	5	9	3	6	8	4
7	6	1	3	5	2	8	4	9
8	5	2	9	6	4	1	7	3
3	9	4	7	8	1	5	2	6

DID YOU KNOW? ... LET'S DISCUSS ON FACEBOOK (Earth Day)

*International Earth Day, which was founded by Gaylord Nelson, is celebrated each year on the March equinox; this is often March 20. On the other hand, a global observance is held each year on **April 22** by many countries, including the U.S. The USAU Youth therefore calls on you to join us for a whole month to celebrate Earth Day once again. Remember; let the dates not limit your efforts because every day is earth day.*

Africa's Vulnerability to Climate Change

Did you know that Africa has been dealing with the impacts of climate change since the 1970s? Some estimates of climate change in Africa state that by 2018, about 75 to 250 million people, or even as many as 1.8 billion people by the end of this century, will be exposed to water stress. By 2020, rain fed agriculture in some African countries could drop by 50% and wheat may completely disappear from the continent by 2080. Arid and semi-arid lands are likely to increase by 8%, with severe consequences for livelihoods, poverty maintaining the MDGs.

Two-thirds of Africa is classified as concentrated in the Sahel region and large parts of Southern Africa. You also know that due to land degradation about 6 million hectares of productive land has been lost in Africa since 1990, and 2/3 of that lost by the year 2025? Some African countries are experiencing significant climatic decreases in rainfall, and more frequent and intense tropical storms.

Some of the consequences of the continent include: health problems, desertification and famine, the degradation of the natural habitat for a decline in the diversity of all life forms, and the endangering of some animal species like gorillas, and elephants to name a few.



Photo of the earth by PICS4LEARNING.COM

as deserts or dry lands. These regions, the Horn of Africa, including the Kalahari. Did you know that about 6 million hectares of productive land has been lost in Africa since 1990, and 2/3 of that lost by the year 2025? Some African countries are experiencing significant climatic decreases in rainfall, and more frequent and intense tropical storms.

environmental degradation in problems, coastal erosion, depletion of farming land, aquatic and land animals, and on earth; such as the endangering of some animal species like gorillas, and elephants to name a few.

Health and Environment in Africa

By another estimate, over 180 million people in sub-Saharan Africa could die of diseases directly linked to climate change by the end of the century. Throughout the developing world, traditional medicines are the primary source of health care for up to 80% of the population, the ramification of deforestation will be very injurious to these Africans. By 2015, the vast majority of Africa's population will continue to rely on unsafe water sources, which are exposed to increasing contamination and pollution.

Chemical safety is also another environmental challenge on the continent. Farmers are ignorant of hazards posed by pesticides which they often use without observing the recommended precautions. Statistics of poisonings cases have estimated that between 46 to 84 percent of all poisoning in adults is attributable to their occupation or the environment, with a higher percentage, between 60 and 98 percent occurring in children.

How can the African youth participate in the resolution of this problem?

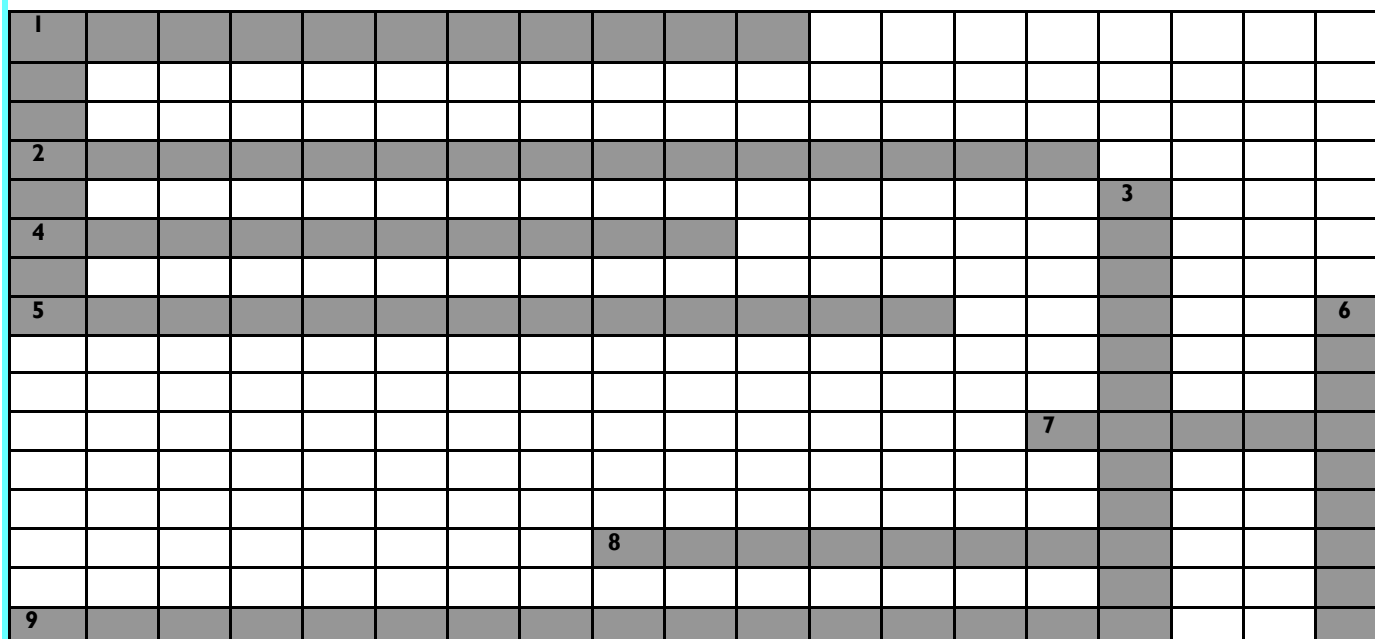
Inform and empower local communities to address deforestation and climate change issues by teaching them about the environment or engaging them in your conversations about your environmental concerns. Practice the 3Rs (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) by making nature crafts at home or at school, plant trees, or just dress in environmental colors such as green or brown.

So then, join us to celebrate Earth Day and share with us the activities you do to commemorate this day throughout the year, by putting up your activities and links directly on our Facebook page via: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Did-You-Know-Le-Saviez-Vous/181760325263595>

This information has been provided through various open sources

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Read through our articles on our *'Did You know? ... Let's Discuss on Facebook'* column in order to answer all the crossword puzzles. Thank you!



ACROSS

1. The cultivation of land, production of crops and raising of livestock
2. The transformation of arable or habitable land to desert, by a change in climate or destructive land use
4. Land that is located where the prevailing climate is suitable (not too hot or too cold) and can be used for growing crops due to its qualities of fresh water supply and rich nutrients
5. The indiscriminate cutting down trees or clearing off of forests
7. A semiarid region of north-central Africa and south of the Sahara desert which consists of Senegal, southern Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, southern Algeria, Niger, northern Nigeria, northern Cameroon, Sudan, and Eritrea
8. massive, grassy savanna which stretches from Namibia to Zimbabwe, covering parts of South Africa and Botswana
9. A region that lies south of the Sahara desert

DOWN

1. Land characterized by evaporation that exceeds rainfall, with low annual rainfall, and sparse vegetation
3. A region found in the easternmost part of Africa and consists of Somalia, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Sudan
6. The act or process of introducing contaminants into the environment which causes instability, disorder, harm or discomfort to the physical systems or living organisms

ANSWERS: DOWN - 1. Agriculture 2. Desertification 4. Arable Land 5. Deforestation 7. Sahel 8. Kalahari 9. Sub Saharan Africa
ACROSS - 1. Arid Land 3. Horn of Africa 6. Pollution

A WORD TO THE WISE - DR. RAYMONDE AGOSSOU (Mama Africa)

Dr. Raymonde Agossou is the Head of the Human Resources and Youth Division of the African Union. She is fondly known among many young Africans across the continent as "Mama Africa," due to her firm belief in what young people can do for the continent as well as the efforts she puts into ensuring that their voice is heard at the African Union. Most of all,

she makes sure that they are given a chance to bring use their innovation toward the development to the continent.

The USAU Youth: Please tell us a little about yourself and what your duties at the African Union entail?

Dr. Raymonde Agossou (Mama Africa): Okay let's begin by talking about myself. I'm Dr. Raymonde Agossou and I've been working for the African Union for about 7 years now, as *Head of Division of Human Resource and Youth Development*. Before coming here,

**DR. Raymonde Agossou:
Head of the Human Resources
and Youth Division - AUC**

I worked for 7 years as an *Education Programme Officer* with UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) in Benin, my home country. Earlier on, I worked at USAID (U.S. Agency for International Development) from 1996 to 1997 as an *Educational Reform Project Officer*, and before that I was a teacher. So that's my professional background. My academic background includes a Masters degree in *Arts and Literature* and a Ph.D. in *Science Education*. After my Ph.D, which I received while studying in Montreal, I went back home to serve my country.

Now there are two main things I do here in the AU, the first is to *develop a framework for Africa to improve human resource capacity*, and the second is to *work on youth development*. I was told that I had to put in place the *African Charter for Africa's Youth* because there was nothing like that on the ground; there were no documents to properly address youth issues and there was no legal framework wherein they could have a voice.

The biggest challenge was putting the African Youth Charter in place; but the good thing was that, it really turned out to be a very successful document. What I'm working on right now is to *promote and improve youth development efforts across the continent*, in reference to the African Youth Charter. We have also elaborated within the youth development framework, a *strategy to revitalize technical and vocational education and training (TVET)* directly connected to the Second Decade of Education for Africa. From that continental strategy for TVET, a *post conflict framework* has equally been developed and implemented so that young people can contribute to the reconstruction processes. It was a pilot project for which only three pilot countries (Liberia, the Republic of Congo, and Burundi) were selected for that phase.

Within the same youth development framework, the **African Union Youth Volunteers Corps (AU-YVC)** was gradually established, with the strong involvement of a few devoted young people. It's only 2 years old and not fully operational yet, but we are improving on it as time goes on. The AU-YVC aims to strengthen youth participation and contribution to development, as well as project implementation and community welfare. It also addresses youth empowerment and capacity-building from various angles while promoting the philosophy of Pan-Africanism, and improving overall knowledge of Africa, as well as the role of the African Union Commission in empowering the youth. The organization also advances shared values such as service, leadership, team spirit, and a sense of belonging to those living on the continent.

Another success was the well-organized intergenerational debate between the youth and the African Heads of State, during the June 2011 AU Summit in Malabo which focused on young people in Africa. At the moment we are working on the implementation of the Malabo decisions, focusing on the very concrete recommendations from the very first AU Heads of State's Summit on *youth empowerment for sustainable development in Africa*.

The USAU Youth: With all these good initiatives you've worked so hard to put in place for Africa's youth, it's therefore not a surprise that young Africans have named you *Mama Africa*. How do you feel about that?

Dr. Raymonde Agossou (Mama Africa): I feel very honored although I must also admit that it sounds a little too much for me. As a matter of fact, I am very passionate about young Africans and what they can do for our continent, for our world; but there's so much I'm yet to do before I ever get to feel deserving enough to be called 'MAMA AFRICA'... that's big.

The USAU Youth: Now, in relation to the AU-YVC program, can you tell us some of the successes you've observed since its launch in 2010? What do you hope to achieve?

Dr. Raymonde Agossou (Mama Africa): What I can see as a success right now is the *genuine interest from the young people themselves* – we put this program in place for them. As of right now, we have *trained two groups of volunteers, but we call each group a batch*; and each time we call for applications, the amount of interest raised from the young people is amazing. The program has registered about **2000 volunteer applications online** from which we have to select and train the third batch of volunteers.

Another success is in the partnerships we've created. *Our connections with other volunteer organizations* like the *Peace Corps Volunteers*, the *Voluntary Service Overseas*, and the *United Nations Volunteers* is constantly growing as we learn, exchange, and support one another, allowing us to improve our program.

The growing interest from our development partners (both bilateral and multilateral) will push the program forward. Many of them have declared that this is one of the most concrete programs that the African Union Commission has established and it needs to be encouraged. I must mention here, with great appreciation, the special collaboration we have built with the U.S., following the exchange of our youth volunteers. This kind of agreement must continue, not only with USAU, but also with other organizations and institutions. The fact that you

A WORD TO THE WISE - DR. RAYMONDE AGOSSOU (Mama Africa)

are sitting in front of me, as a deployed AU youth volunteer, shows our success. There are also other Departments at the AU that trust the program a lot and have requested to host trained volunteers, such as the Departments of Social Affairs and of Peace and Security.

I must also recognize the *interest from the Member States* although it's a mitigated one, I still count it as a success because of the decisions they've made from Malabo to Addis Ababa. They are very keen in ensuring that this program stays African for African youth. When I talk about mitigation, it is my wish that the Member States get more involved in this program, because *this program is an African program for African youth; our children, their children!* Whatever we put in place for these children, who will take over the leadership soon, should be something we Africans are proud of and it is for us to prepare them for that leadership role.

The USAU Youth: So, what is your dream for your children, the African youth who look up to you from all across the continent?

Dr. Raymonde Agossou (Mama Africa): In one phrase I'll say *"I want them (young Africans) to be happy!"* By this I mean that young people need to be considered as partners to the development of the continent. From what I saw in your contributions and those of other young people, young Africans are quite knowledgeable, and this knowledge is what they can bring on the table; people should stop ignoring that part of our population, the biggest portion!

One of my dreams *is to make sure that the young people are regarded as those citizens who can bring vital contributions.* The second is *to have young people participating in a constructive and positive manner to the broader political dialogue.* It is known that some African leaders mobilize the youth only for their political ambitions and campaigns, or post-election conflicts; young people should be included in all aspects.

One more thing I dream of is that *the youth should be well prepared, well-educated, and skilled enough to take over the leadership of this continent and run it effectively.* As stated by one of the youth working with me in the division - *If we cannot prepare tomorrow for the youth, the least we can do is to prepare the youth for tomorrow.*

The USAU Youth: What do you do to ensure that your dreams are actually materialized? What do you think young people can do on a personal level to make things better on the continent?

Dr. Raymonde Agossou (Mama Africa): What I do in my position to make my dreams come true for young Africans is that *I do my work to the best of my ability and in my work, the African Youth Charter is the key.* I expect all the Member States to ratify this charter, and beyond the ratification, we want them to effectively implement it in their various countries. This document is so broad and touches a lot of aspects that affect the lives of young Africans. It talks about education, skills development, freedoms, access to health; it constitutes all the needs of the African youth today. *If Member States can take this document and honestly begin implementing the things that are stipulated in that charter, I believe all my dreams will come true.* What young people can do on their part, since this question has two sides, is that they should *ensure that they use what they already know in a positive manner, and build up a team spirit.* Let them use what they have to be part of the process in a constructive

way and not destroy what has been put in place for them, simply because it does not reflect their way of doing things. They should be brave enough to sit around the table and say this is how I think this or that should be done. That is how I see things. They have good innovative ideas, which they must talk about in order to be heard.

The USAU Youth: Thank you so much for that point because if we are brave enough to say how we think things should be done, we won't have to be at the frontline of every conflict.

Dr. Raymonde Agossou (Mama Africa): That's right.

The USAU Youth: In your endeavors to make your dreams a reality you must have faced a lot of challenges; we are interested in hearing a little about them.

Dr. Raymonde Agossou (Mama Africa): This work is kind of difficult because it is a new area. If you are aware of the difficulties that existed when the debate on gender matters began, you'll notice that the challenges are similar to what we now face in promoting youth issues. It's a difficult sector to convince people about because, whenever I talk to people and say the youth should be the target in everything and be given a role in every process, the response I always get is that it is a *"cross-cutting issue."* I know women used to hear the same song at some point but when you agree that an issue is cross-cutting, you must also convince people that if this is considered only as a cross-cutting issue, a lot of important aspects are likely to be ignored and may disappear in the process. So we will continue advocating for the youth and their specific needs through the Africa Youth Charter and the Decade for Youth Development. We will never get tired until we get the same attention that has been given to other issues.

The USAU Youth: That is the youthful spirit – Never give up. As close as most young Africans feel to you, there's so much they do not know about 'Mama Africa.' Please tell us some of your life experiences.

Dr. Raymonde Agossou (Mama Africa): You know I may look like someone whose life was like a straight line and everything went well and, even though my life was not that difficult, it wasn't so easy as well. As a little girl, I never had the pleasure of enjoying my mother like every little girl will want to. Like sitting and talking with her, strolling with her in the streets or going shopping. I didn't have any of that because when I turned 8 years old, my mom fell sick and was bed ridden. This lasted for 18 years. So, I had to be responsible at a very young age – by age of 9 or 10. At the age of 12, I had to go to school, come back home and go to the market, cook and clean, since my elder sister was handicapped and could not assist, and my brother was too young to contribute. Even though I took responsibility very early, that did not affect my performance in school. My father was very strict

"The youth should be well prepared, well-educated, and skilled enough to take over the leadership of this continent and run it effectively."

and followed my school performance very closely, to make sure that I made no excuses about not studying because I was doing house chores. When I succeeded in my final examinations I came home and told him that *"Papa I made it in my examination,"* and he was surprised and said *"no way, you have been working so hard at home and hardly had time to study."* So I told him *"You can go ahead and ask the school, I did it."* He was overjoyed for me. After that I went to boarding school and someone was taking care of my mother. But it was very challenging for me, because I was in school but my mind and heart were back at home. Anytime someone came I thought they were coming to say my mom had died.

What I'm grateful to God about is that she fell ill when we were little kids but by the time she died, I had received my Masters degree and was working. It was a blessing for me because if she had died when I was little, I might not have achieved all I have. It's not a good thing for a child to grow having a sick mom but that made me strong, determined and responsible. So I look at myself as someone who can face so many challenges at the same time.

In my professional life I faced a lot of challenges because going from teaching to project development wasn't an easy transition. I remember when I was recruited to work with USAID they asked me if I had any questions and I asked *"Do you recruit people who are fully ready for the job?"* I was told *"No, we do not recruit people who are fully ready because working here is also a learning process, so that the day you decide to leave here you will be better prepared for the next job."* That was true because two years later when I found a new job at UNICEF and told my supervisor that I was leaving he said *"Okay, I'm very happy for you, it was our job to prepare you for a better job."* That was the first time I ever heard such a good statement from a supervisor whose job I was leaving because, he didn't take it badly he just told me I was being prepared for that. I also received two awards during my time spent at USAID: one for *outstanding performance* and the other for *working in team spirit*. That also encouraged me because it made me understand that, whenever you are doing your work, somebody somewhere is seeing that and appreciating it.

Also when I got married at the age of 27, I was very naïve about so many things but I was lucky enough to be married to a man who always encouraged me. He was always like *"you have to do it, I trust you, and I know you can do it."* So he was a very persuasive person, always pushing me to be better. And to have someone who encourages you in this way is something very important in anyone's life, because when you seem to fail and want to give up, and there's that someone next to you to say *"go for it, I know you can do it,"* that alone is an important factor for you to become a winner. God knows my husband pushed me to be the woman I am professionally. When I got a scholarship for excellence in Canada to do my Ph.D. my youngest child was just 1 month old. So I asked him *"what do you want me to do with this baby? I cannot leave her here and go."* My husband said *"give me a better reason, am I not her father?"* This is something I know many women do not hear from their husbands. He told me he'll take care of the baby and her older siblings because what I was going to do was for them, for him, and for the family, so by my husband, I was bound to go. I left when the baby was already four months old and it was difficult for me to leave her, and everyone was crying but I had to leave for Canada. I was however very impressed and surprised at how well they were taken care of by their father in my absence. My eldest daughter

performed so well in primary school that she was promoted to skip the examination class at the primary level and go directly into secondary school.

It's therefore a blessing for me to have a husband who encourages and permits me to follow whatever duty my professional life calls, and many people ask how we do it. He is in Vienna now and I am here in Addis, at another time he was in one place, I was in another. For 30 years of our marriage we've spent about 6 years together and in spite of that we are fine and still together. Everybody is struggling at their own end but things are okay and we're trying to understand each other. This is something very important, to have a partnership where you both understand each other's professional challenges, so that whatever you do, you can do it together and all the benefits that come in will be for the good of everyone, especially for the young people you bring to life and have to raise. So if I didn't have that man in my life maybe I wouldn't have a Ph.D. because another man would've asked me to stay at home and raise the children. Bottom line it's important to have a man who understands and encourages you to succeed and this is something I wish for every woman who is working around the world. I said this somewhere and one young lady told me, *"I want you to be my mentor because what you say is new to me, and the strength I see in you is something I'd like to have."* And after making all those difficult choices all the children have succeeded in their education. We are grateful!

The USAU Youth: Now we are asking for some motherly advice in one statement; a life lesson which will ensure that your many children across Africa make you proud tomorrow. We call it "A Word from the Wise."

Dr. Raymonde Agossou (Mama Africa): I think if I have to say anything I'll say, *"Stand for what you believe in and defend it; do not cheat people."*

When standing for what you believe in, make sure you are not defending crazy ideas; ensure that it is a good and constructive idea, then stand for it and defend it.

In the world today, never cheat people, do not cheat on life, and do not cheat on yourself, because I know one thing: what goes around always comes around. So always make sure you do what is right no matter how disturbed you are. The truth will always set you free. This gives me strength when I face challenges in life or related to work. I know it will definitely come around.

The USAU Youth: Thank you Mama Africa it was really an honor talking with you today. On behalf of all young Africans I'll like to say, thank you for the devotion you put in your work for the good of Africa's youth and for sharing this part of your life with us.

Dr. Raymonde Agossou (Mama Africa): Thank you very much and I'm happy to have you here and I'm very happy to do what I do because I can see the difference.

*Bari Fanso
African Union Youth Volunteer (AU-YV)
USAU Youth Liaison to the AU*

*"Stand for
what you
believe
in and
defend it;
do not
cheat
people."*

THE VOICE OF VOLUNTEERS - OLALEKAN MICHAEL-AINA

As I waved goodbye to the beautiful skyline of Lagos, I was filled with immense anticipation of what to expect in Ghana, the next Anglophone neighbors of Nigeria within the West African region. One hour later, the plane touched down at the Kotoka International Airport, where I was *akwaaba* (*welcome*) with the rush of heat that dominates the country's weather. So I stepped my feet on Ghanaian soil without a lot of expectations, since I had been told a number of times back home that Nigerians and Ghanaians are similar in almost everything. However, I was shocked at how similar we were from the *Pidgin English* (*Pidgin English sounds a little like Jamaican English and is widely spoken in most Anglophone west African countries and some parts of Central Africa*) we spoke, to the type of food we ate.



Olalekan Michael (extreme right) and friends from his home country, Nigeria, during the AU-YVC training in Malabo - Equatorial Guinea.

Just as it will be for any newcomer to any land, navigating was a problem. What was however a little different and difficult was describing where one was going to within the capital city. No one ever used street names except landmarks. It was a challenge which I later overcame becoming a human map.

I have particularly developed keen interest in the “Azonto” dance form in which my newly found friends in Ghana are giving me lessons. The Azonto dance has permeated the socio-cultural fabric of the Ghanaian society.

This dance form has become popular especially with Ghanaian entertainment industry. Most musical videos in Ghana now perform snippets of the dance form, bringing into the entertainment industry a complete novel experience.

My work at the West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) in Ghana where I am attached to the program department of the institute encompasses training and capacity building, policy advocacy and research and documentation. The institute strengthens the capacities of civil society practitioners by creating space for civil society actors to engage the government to foster development. I have been privilege to support policy advocacy trainings for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in country and in Freetown Sierra Leone and that was an experience in itself.

The time I have spent with WACSI has given me the privilege of being one of the beneficiaries of the practical professional molding platform for young civil society actors. Through this, I have gained a better understanding of civil society operations, interventions, and challenges; and issues relevant to civil society that are vital for a healthy society which in turn promotes democracy, peace and peace processes, policy advocacy, gender, human rights and the involvement of youth in the whole process amongst others. Most of all, working in the multi-cultural environment where I have colleagues from different countries in the sub region has been a *mélange* of fun and gaining the confidence of working with people of different cultures and ways of thinking.

The training and experience I got as a member of the second group of the *African Union Youth Volunteers Corps* (AU-YVC) in Malabo no doubt helped me in the internship and adapting quickly to Accra and I am primed and ready for all the possibilities that Africa has to offer. *With all I have acquired I now firmly believe that where I am, what I now have, and the determination within me are enough for me to make my continent the best it can be.*

*‘With all I have
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*Olalekan Michael-Aina
Intern - West Africa Civil Society Institute
African Union Youth Volunteer*

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The USAU Youth thanks all the readers who sent in articles for this month's edition. Please keep sending in the articles, announcements, and information on any subject matter you would like to see in subsequent editions of the newsletter to USAUyouth@state.gov. Kindly share with us activities and pictures of what you or your country is doing in relation to cardiovascular diseases in Africa. Thank you.

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